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THE WAGER
AND OTHER POEMS

By
S. WEIR MITCHELL

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THE WAGER
AND OTHER POEMS

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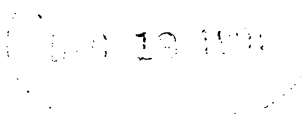
BY

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Col. T. W. Higginson

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THE WAGER

THE WAGER

Time, 1650. Twilight.

The Duke's garden near Tours.

CLAIRE DE CHASTEL BLANC, a lady of the Duchess.

RENÉE LA TOUR.

THE VICOMTE DE LANCAVAL.

LA TOUR walks moodily to and fro.

LA TOUR. Five years ago in this same garden space
I fled the mockery of a smiling face.
Upon my soul, I was a love-sick lad;
A baser man perchance had won; I had
The self-accusing modesty of love,
That by its proud humility doth prove
How honest is its nature. Since that day
Our feet have trod, alas! a diverse way—
Mine as the devil guided, hers to find
A man to match the lightness of her mind.
So runs the world; and always, I suppose,
The thorns outlast for many a year the rose.
What is there memory may care to keep
Of her life or of mine? I basely heap

Dull days on sorrier yesterdays: what more
 Is left to me? And yet—and yet before
 I loved this woman and she bade me go
 For but a love-struck boy, I used to know
 Far other dreams than such as madly keep
 The wild days reeling through the hours of sleep.

[*Pauses.*

So here it was I sang my pretty way
 To steal in sleep a heart was cold by day.
 How long ago it seems! I used to sing
 Not very ill. Ah me! How ran the thing?

[*He sings as he walks.*

Sleep on! Sleep on! Thou canst not fly;
 Thou art the gentle thrall of sleep.
 Thy captured dreams in vain may try
 The daylight's cold reserve to keep.

Sleep on! Those watchful eyes that be
 Thy maiden sentinels by day
 No more shall keep their guard for thee,
 Sweet foes that warned my love away.

And I will kiss thee with a song—

A modest way to kiss! I have it wrong;
 And all the rest, like love, has taken wings
 And gone the deuce knows whither. If some things
 Were like a song, as readily forgot,
 Man's fate on earth might prove a happier lot.

[*A servant enters with a letter. LA TOUR takes it
 and stands in thought, smiling. He opens it in
 an absent way, not yet reading it.*

Here is the woman's name I was to learn
This morning. Well, I trust the lips that earn
My needed ducats are not old. By heaven!
That were an insult scarce to be forgiven,
A jest to cost some drunken reveller dear.

[*Glances at the letter.*

"Claire! — Claire de Chastel Blanc." I did not hear
That name among the many tossed about
On ribald lips last night. Perhaps a doubt,
Or the Duke's presence, or a friend who knew
To check some reckless sot, held back the crew,
Till at the gray of dawn I homeward went,
And left them babbling, on a choice intent.

[*He walks to and fro in thought, and then slowly
tears up the letter, retaining the fragments.*

Now, I 'll not do it! This mad bet of mine,
The bastard child of folly and of wine,
Has somehow lost to-day its vinous zest,
And, in the sober light of morn confessed,
Stirs certain memories. Now, there's my lord—
Her lord—will fume and talk about his sword,
And then is just as like as not, I think,
To pouce the insult and forget in drink.
What of the woman? Wherefore should I spare
The lips that spared not me? Why should I care? [*Pauses.*
I will not do it.

[*As he speaks he casts away the torn paper and
wanders aimlessly to and fro in the Duke's garden.
Of a sudden he sees Claire seated and busy
with the roses lying in her lap.*

(*Aside.*) By St. Opportune,
Who doth for mischief match the naughty moon!

What devil set this trap for me who meant
To swear the wager lost, and well content
To pay and end it, duly penitent
And out of pocket? What would she have lost?
The fool who is her lover scarce will miss
One kiss subtracted from his sum of bliss.
Now, good St. Anthony, who ought to be
The friend of men sore tempted, pray for me;—
You were not tempted, for you knew not love.

[Coming up behind CLAIRE, he bends over and kisses her. She starts to her feet.]

CLAIRE. Now, by dear Marie and all saints above,
You—Renée—kissed me!

LA TOUR. Yes, and, on my soul,
I'm glad and sorry: that sums up the whole,
The sin and penance; larger joy and pain
Than ever I shall know in life again. *[She is silent.]*
For God's sake, speak to me; say something, Claire.

CLAIRE. Your shame lacks courage, sir; how could
you dare?

LA TOUR. Fate, fortune, luck, have never known to
spare

Head, heart, or purse of mine. 'T is very rare
My follies pay as well. How could I dare?
The question's childlike, madam. What! in tears!
These were not counted in my list of fears.

CLAIRE. An idle gossip warned me yestereve
Of this, and you; yet how could I believe
Of one who once—no matter. What I said
Did cost one shameless cheek its share of red.
He little liked my comment; nor would you
Who tossed about amid a gambling crew

What estimate to put upon a kiss,
And set its worth at haply that or this.
He, laughing, swore the chivalry of wine
Did make you set a double price on mine.
You gaily urged, they say, that stolen fruit
Is ever sweeter. May I ask, to suit
The pretty poetry of tavern hours,
If that be also true of stolen flowers?
What need to talk? You have the prize you sought,
A courteous wager!

LA TOUR. Madam, he who brought
This garnished story lied.

CLAIRE. It matters naught;
A man shall question you.

LA TOUR. That were but just;
In point of fact, I really think he must;
And 'twixt a tongue-stab and a rapier-thrust
I gladly choose the latter; but why both
To punish one who never yet was loath
To face a man? Before a mistress' tongue
I cry for pity as I did when young.
Down goes my flag; I counted not the cost,
Else had this silly bet been gladly lost.

CLAIRE. Jest if it please you. Better men have died
For lighter cause than this.

LA TOUR. So I am tried,
Condemned past hope. Ah, Claire, thou ever art
The same cold woman. Could I call my heart
To witness for me—

CLAIRE. 'T is a feeblér jest.

LA TOUR. Perhaps! perhaps! But let me be
confessed.

What if I swear this wager, wildly made,
Was lost ? Wilt say—?

CLAIRE. That you were more afraid
Than fits a man.

LA TOUR. Yes, that may well be said.
'T is you I fear.

CLAIRE. Me! There was once an hour,
Oh, very long ago, should still have power
To hurt you now. What is there more to say ?

LA TOUR. Yes, there are ghosts no priest has power to
lay ;

One is to-morrow, one is yesterday ;
Both have your words called up to-night for me.
But ghosts like these at least do set one free
From such poor scare-souls as an honest blade.
That lays all spectres! Madam, undismayed
I bow before my judge and glad accept
The fate this wretched hour for me has kept.
And for De Lancival, I promise he
Shall in the quickest blade of Picardy
Find naught to hinder what your lips decree.
Say,—when you think upon this hour and me,—
“ He loved me once.” Be that slight epitaph
Deep graven where the miserable half
Of life's most worthless memories serves to keep
Some fading thought of such as, thankful, sleep,
And wake no more on earth.

CLAIRE. You loved me?

LA TOUR. Ay.

CLAIRE. How can it be? If once you loved me, why,
Why did your folly choose of all who live,
Of all fair women, me alone to give

This tavern feast a flavour? Pray you go.
 The modest gentleman I seemed to know
 In memory, kindly, tender, brave, and true,
 Died very long ago. He is not you.
 As willingly would I forget this night
 And think it also dead. You won the right
 To claim your wager.

LA TOUR. Madam, it is I
 Shall tell the Viscount, and with me shall die,
 I promise you, this story. I shall pay
 With what this wrecked life owns of life. I pray,
 As God is good, your pardon. Fare you well.

CLAIRE. Wait—wait a moment. No, you shall not
 tell.

LA TOUR. And why not, madam?

CLAIRE. Hush!

[DE LANCIVAL *approaches, singing.*

DE LANCIVAL. He kissed her twice,
 Or was it thrice?
 Oh, what will kisses fetch?
 You may buy a score
 For a louis d'or.
 Now, that 's a pretty catch.

Out with it, Claire.

What fortune had he? Did he really dare?
 No need to go, La Tour. We all have heard.
 Oh, there were bets on it. Right well it stirred
 The inn's good fellows. I, too, had my bet
 La Tour would lose.

CLAIRE. Indeed!

LA TOUR. At what was set
My beggared chance of fortune?

DE LANCIVAL. I forget.

CLAIRE. I, too, am curious.

DE LANCIVAL. I am not clear
How much it was; a very trifle, dear:
Some dozen louis—hardly worth one's while.

CLAIRE. Yet it might set the value of—

LA TOUR. A smile—

DE LANCIVAL. Who said a smile? 'T was nothing
but a kiss.

CLAIRE. They make fair company. Perchance to
miss

The gracious comment of a smile might take
Some value from the lips' resort, and make
Their rosy honours less.

DE LANCIVAL. What did I bet?

[*Searches his tablets.*]

I had it yesternight. Just here 't was set,
Upon my honour!

LA TOUR. That 's a pious oath
That no commandment breaks.

DE LANCIVAL. St. Denis! Both
Are set to read me riddles. I for one—

LA TOUR. An easy riddle. Nowhere 'neath the sun
On land or sea the thing is found. Pardie!
Swear by a thing less mortal.

DE LANCIVAL. I make free
To think you mock me. But who was it won?

LA TOUR. I won, my lord. The trick was neatly
done.

DE LANCIVAL. You won? Claire! Claire!

LA TOUR. Indeed, it so befell,
I won my ducats and some thoughts as well
A man could do without.

CLAIRE. It is not true.
The beau sire jests—no courteous thing to do.

LA TOUR. By Venus, I have but my word to give.
Here as she sat I kissed her, as I live!

DE LANCIVAL. Ye saints! The man has luck. Now,
when I bring
This news to-night, the tavern roof will ring.
I never dared as much. To kiss her hand
Was my slim ration. I may understand
You really kissed her?

LA TOUR. Yes.

DE LANCIVAL. Well—as one may
Kiss any woman for a wager's play;
Had she kissed you I should have more to say.

CLAIRE. Then take the truth: I kissed him as he lay
A-sleeping in the garden. Now, sir, pray,
What is it more your lordship has to say?

DE LANCIVAL. You kissed La Tour?

CLAIRE. I did.

DE LANCIVAL. Now, by my sword—

LA TOUR. That's nearer kin to cursing. Well, my lord—

DE LANCIVAL. Is this a jest?

CLAIRE. That may somewhat depend
On how a maudlin tragedy shall end.

LA TOUR. I wait your orders, Viscount.

DE LANCIVAL. Nonsense ! Why
Should you or I for such a trifle die ?
Yet, as a friend, La Tour, I take fair leave
To doubt her story.

LA TOUR. Then, my lord,—I grieve
To put it coarsely,—does this lady lie?
I wait your answer. Is it she or I?
She doth depose to kissing one La Tour.
He swears in turn and is devoutly sure
He kissed the lady. Neither doth exclude
Belief in either. You, my lord, are shrewd.
Which is the sinner?

CLAIRE. Stay, sir.

DE LANCIVAL. You shall hear
From me to-morrow.

LA TOUR. And why not next year?
Had I once loved this gentle lady's face
His shrift were short, and small his chance of grace,
That dared to think those haughty lips could kiss
A man whom, dead, no man on earth would miss
Save some poor tapster. Sir, you seem to show
Small skill at riddles. Follow me.

CLAIRE. No, no.
Here must it end. A most unseemly brawl!
I 'll have no more of it. It does not call
For such grave consequences. Let it end.

DE LANCIVAL. With all my heart; and now, to surely
mend
A needless quarrel, I, for one, agree
A kiss, my mischief-brewing maid, shall be
My own reward, his ransom.

CLAIRE. Here must stop
This tragedy, which seems inclined to drop
To something comic. I have long endured
A bond not of my making. Rest assured
This day forever breaks it.

LA TOUR. And beware,
Be very careful that you do not share
This tale with tap-room friends. Remember, too,
I lost this wager and will pay my due.

DE LANCIVAL. When once the wine is out comes
folly in.
So said the Duke, and bet that you would win
And vow you did not. For my lady there,
She 'll change her mind to-morrow. I can bear
My tenth dismissal gaily.

[He goes away singing.]

"I would I were a priest,"
Quoth the devil;
"I would shrive me twice a day
And then revel."
"I would I were a girl,"
Quoth the devil,
"With a lie in every curl."

LA TOUR. He shall rue
This insolence.

CLAIRE. No, Renée. What of you?

LA TOUR. No more of me. I rid you of a fool
Who went his way as unconcerned and cool
As though love's perfect roses knew to grow
On every hedge. Now have I also earned
The tardy wages of a fool, and learned
Too late the lesson of a vain regret
For what life might have been.

CLAIRE. And yet—and yet—

LA TOUR. By heaven, do not trifle with me now !

Take care!

Think ere you speak. Be very certain, Claire.
 Hope was so dead. I count it no light thing
 To give love's winter rose a day of spring.
 You tremble, hesitate—

[*Voices from a distance call, " Claire, Claire! "* LA

TOUR *seizes her hand as she turns to go.*

Ah, let me share

Thy heart's wise counsel, Claire. I pray you spare
 A man twice hurt. Give me a minute, one—

[*Voices call her. She moves away in haste.*

You cannot leave me thus.

CLAIRE.

Sir, I have done.

You won your bet. But what, sir, gave the right
 To think you won a heart ?

[*The voices approach.*

Enough. Good night.

[*LA TOUR looks after her until she is lost behind a
 hedge in the twilight.*

LA TOUR. The man is gone to heal his petty smart
 With wine, sure balsam for a broken heart.
 A comedy? Perhaps! And, by the rood,
 The plot unlooked for and the acting shrewd:
 A stately woman, resolute and sweet,
 A bragging coward; and, to be complete,
 This tavern hero, with, one ought to state,
 King of the stage, Life's greatest actor, Fate!
 I served her purpose well, and so once more—
 I ever the sad loser as before—
 We part. The usual ending, exeunt all.
 And for the moral: It doth oft befall

One woman pays with usury the debts
Of that half-dozen maids a man forgets.

*[A glove cast over the hedge falls at LA TOUR's
feet; he picks it up.]*

I would it were my lord's. A woman's glove!

CLAIRE. What rhymes to that?

LA TOUR. By every saint above,
How should I know?

CLAIRE. Why not a woman's love?

1897.

THE BIRTH AND DEATH OF PAIN

A POEM READ OCTOBER SIXTEENTH, MDCCCXCVI, AT THE
COMMEMORATION OF THE FIFTIETH ANNIVERSARY OF THE
FIRST PUBLIC DEMONSTRATION OF SURGICAL ANÆSTHE-
SIA IN THE MASSACHUSETTS GENERAL HOSPITAL, BOSTON.

FORGIVE a moment, if a friend's regret
Delay the task your honouring kindness set.
I miss one face to all men ever dear;
I miss one voice that all men loved to hear.
How glad were I to sit with you apart,
Could the dead master¹ use his higher art
To lift on wings of ever-lightsome mirth
The burdened muse above the dust of earth,
To stamp with jests the heavy ore of thought,
To give a day with proud remembrance fraught,
The vital pathos of that Holmes-spun art
Which knew so well to reach the common heart!
Alas! for me, for you, that fatal hour!
Gone is the master! Ah! not mine the power
To gild with jests that almost win a tear
The thronging memories that are with us here.

¹ Oliver Wendell Holmes.

The Birth of Pain! Let centuries roll away;
Come back with me to nature's primal day.
What mighty forces pledged the dust to life!
What awful will decreed its silent strife,
Till through vast ages rose on hill and plain
Life's saddest voice, the birthright wail of pain!
The keener sense and ever-growing mind
Served but to add a torment twice refined,
As life, more tender as it grew more sweet,
The cruel links of sorrow found complete
When yearning love, to conscious pity grown,
Felt the mad pain-thrills that were not its own.

What will implacable, beyond our ken,
Set this stern fiat for the tribes of men?
This none shall 'scape who share our human fates:
One stern democracy of anguish waits
By poor men's cots, within the rich man's gates.
What purpose hath it? Nay, thy quest is vain:
Earth hath no answer. If the baffled brain
Cries, 'T is to warn, to punish—ah, refrain!
When writhes the child beneath the surgeon's hand,
What soul shall hope that pain to understand?
Lo! Science falters o'er the hopeless task,
And Love and Faith in vain an answer ask,
When thrilling nerves demand what good is wrought
Where torture clogs the very source of thought.

Lo! Mercy, ever broadening down the years,
Seeks but to count a lessening sum of tears.
The rack is gone; the torture-chamber lies
A sorry show for shuddering tourist eyes.

How useless pain both church and state have learned
Since the last witch or patient martyr burned.
Yet still, forever, he who strove to gain
By swift despatch a shorter lease for pain
Saw the grim theatre, and 'neath his knife
Felt the keen torture in the quivering life.
A word for him who, silent, grave, serene,
The thought-stirred actor on that tragic scene,
Recorded pity through the hand of skill,
Heard not a cry, but, ever conscious, still
In mercy merciless, swift, bold, intent,
Felt the slow moments that in torture went
While 'neath his touch, as none to-day has seen,
In anguish shook life's agonized machine.
The task is o'er; the precious blood is stayed;
But double price the hour of tension paid.
A pitying hand is on the sufferer's brow—
"Thank God 't is over." Few who face me now
Recall this memory. Let the curtain fall;
Far gladder days shall know this storied hall!

Though Science, patient as the fruitful years,
Still taught our art to close some fount of tears,
Yet who that served this sacred home of pain
Could e'er have dreamed one scarce-imagined gain,
Or hoped a day would bring his fearful art
No need to steel the ever-kindly heart?

So fled the years! while haply here or there
Some trust delusive left the old despair;
Some comet thought flashed fitful through the night,
Prophetic promise of the coming light;

Then radiant morning broke, and ampler hope
To art and science gave illumined scope.

What angel bore the Christlike gift inspired !
What love divine with noblest courage fired
One eager soul that paid in bitter tears
For the glad helping of unnumbered fears,
From the strange record of creation tore
The sentence sad each sorrowing mother bore,
Struck from the roll of pangs one awful sum,
Made pain a dream, and suffering gently dumb!

Whatever triumphs still shall hold the mind,
Whatever gift shall yet enrich mankind,
Ah! here no hour shall strike through all the years,
No hour as sweet as when hope, doubt, and fears,
'Mid deepening stillness, watched one eager brain,
With Godlike will, decree the Death of Pain.

How did we thank him? Ah! no joy-bells rang,
No pæans greeted, and no poet sang;
No cannon thundered from the guarded strand
This mighty victory to a grateful land!
We took the gift so humbly, simply given,
And, coldly selfish—left our debt to Heaven.
How shall we thank him? Hush! A gladder hour
Has struck for him; a wiser, juster power
Shall know full well how fitly to reward
The generous soul that found the world so hard.

Oh, fruitful Mother, you whose thronging states
Shall deal not vainly with man's changing fates,

Of free-born thought or war's heroic deeds
Much have your proud hands given, but naught exceeds
This heaven-sent answer to the cry of prayer,
This priceless gift which all mankind may share.

A solemn hour for such as gravely pause
To note the process of creation's laws!
Ah, surely, He whose dark, unfathomed mind
With prescient thought the scheme of life designed,
Who bade His highest creature slowly rise,
Spurred by sad needs and lured by many a prize,
Saw with a God's pure joy His ripening plan,
His highest mercy brought by man to man.

1896.

A PRAYER

“And in Thy majesty ride prosperously, because of truth and meekness and righteousness; and Thy right hand shall teach Thee terrible things.”—Psalm xlv. 4.

ALMIGHTY GOD! eternal source
Of every arm we dare to wield,
Be Thine the thanks, as Thine the force,
On reeling deck or stricken field;
The thunder of the battle hour
Is but the whisper of Thy power.

Thine is our wisdom, Thine our might;
Oh, give us, more than strength and skill,
The calmness born of sense of right,
The steadfast heart, the quiet will
To keep the awful tryst with death,
To know Thee in the cannon's breath.

By Thee was given the thought that bowed
All hearts upon the victor deck,
When, high above the battle shroud,
The white flag fluttered o'er the wreck,
And Thine the hand that checked the cheer
In that wild hour of death and fear!

O Lord of love! be Thine the grace
To teach, amid the wrath of war,
Sweet pity for a humbled race,
Some thought of those in lands afar
Where sad-eyed women vainly yearn
For those who never shall return.

Great Master of earth's mighty school,
Whose children are of every land,
Inform with love our alien rule,
And stay us with Thy warning hand
If, tempted by imperial greed,
We, in Thy watchful eyes, exceed;

That in the days to come, O Lord,
When we ourselves have passed away,
And all are gone who drew the sword,
The children of our breed may say,
These were our sires, who, doubly great,
Could strike, yet spare the fallen state.

THE PASSING OF TENNYSON

DUTY, FAITH, AND LOVE

I SEE a black barge, ere the night is o'er,
Come on death's mighty tide;
And one who fears not, on a lessening shore
Its coming doth abide.

On the deck three spirits wait;
One, a queen of strength and state,
Duty, mistress of the great.
At her feet two maidens kneel—
Courage, with the ready steel,
Honour, with the stainless shield.
And her eyes are set afar
On a single argent star
Steadfast in the azure field.

Faith, a spirit more sublime,
Looks across the darkened sea;
The patience of Eternity
Hath taught her soul the scorn of time,
And the splendour of her eyes
Inherits awful memories.

Love, that from each sister's might
Gathers strength to feed delight,
Chants with heaven-lifted head :
" Behold our sacred dead ;
This is he, a king of song ;
Last of those to whom belong
That sword of light
Which, ever dull within a meaner hand,
Shines for the Knights of God a burning brand."

Rose the queenly sister's praise :
" This is he of blameless days.
Ay, this is he
Who, with increase of thought,
In lofty measures taught.
To follow me,
Devoid of mean pretence,
Were wisdom in the scorn of consequence."

And that other sister cried :
" This is he my soul has tried.
Ever since his song began,
Through the large competence of man,
Unto life's crumbling edge,
While the faint sunset light did yet endure,
He kept my undiminished pledge
Of Faith secure."

Spake anew the gentler Queen :
" By his side I walked unseen
Through the wide world of men.
Again, and still again,

As one who understands,
With word-winged thought
 He taught
The double love of God and man,
That since the ages ran
Doth keep in perfect touch our sister hands.
For we are they with whom his life did move,—
Duty, and Faith, and Love,—
And he for whom we wait,
The last and loneliest of the great
Who waked the infant century with their lays,
And to its waning days
 Still sang elate.
O Singer, resolute and strong,
We bear thy soul to starry homes of Song."

TO A MAGNOLIA FLOWER

IN THE GARDEN OF THE ARMENIAN CONVENT
AT VENICE

I SAW thy beauty in its high estate
Of perfect empire, where at set of sun
In the cool twilight of thy lucent leaves
The dewy freshness told that day was done.

Hast thou no gift beyond thine ivory cone's
Surpassing loveliness? Art thou not near—
More near than we—to nature's silentness;
Is it not voiceful to thy finer ear?

Thy folded secrecy doth like a charm
Compel to thought. What spring-born yearning lies
Within the quiet of thy stainless breast
That doth with languorous passion seem to rise?

The soul doth truant angels entertain
Who with reluctant joy their thoughts confess:
Low-breathing, to these sister spirits give
The virgin mysteries of thy heart to guess.

What whispers hast thou from yon childlike sea
That sobs all night beside these garden walls?
Canst thou interpret what the lark hath sung
When from the choir of heaven her music falls?

If for companionship of purity
The equal pallor of the risen moon
Disturb thy dreams, dost know to read aright
Her silver tracery on the dark lagoon?

The mischief-making fruitfulness of May
Stirs all the garden folk with vague desires.
Doth there not reach thine apprehensive ear
The faded longing of these dark-robed friars,

When, in the evening hour to memories given,
Some gray-haired man amid the gathering gloom
For one delirious moment sees again
The gleam of eyes and white-walled Erzeroum?

Hast thou not loved him for this human dream?
Or sighed with him who yester-evening sat
Upon the low sea-wall, and saw through tears
His ruined home and snow-clad Ararat?

If thou art dowered with some refined sense
That shares the counsels of the nesting bird,
Canst hear the mighty laughter of the earth,
And all that ear of man hath never heard,

If the abysmal stillness of the night
Be eloquent for thee, if thou canst read
The glowing rubric of the morning song,
Doth each new day no gentle warning breed?

Shall not the gossip of the maudlin bee,
The fragrant history of the fallen rose,
Unto the prescience of instinctive love
Some humbler prophecy of joy disclose?

Cold vestal of the leafy convent cell,
The traitor days have thy calm trust betrayed;
The sea-wind boldly parts thy shining leaves
To let the angel in. Be not afraid!

The gold-winged sun, divinely penetrant,
The pure annunciation of the morn
Breathes o'er thy chastity, and to thy soul
The tender thrill of motherhood is borne.

Set wide the glory of thy radiant bloom!
Call every wind to share thy scented breaths!
No life is brief that doth perfection win.
To-day is thine—to-morrow thou art death's!

CORTINO D'AMPEZZO, *July*, 1897.

ON A BOY'S FIRST READING OF
THE PLAY OF "KING HENRY
THE FIFTH"

WHEN youth was lord of my unchallenged fate,
And time seemed but the vassal of my will,
I entertained certain guests of state—
The great of older days, who, faithful still,
Have kept with me the pact my youth had made.

And I remember how one galleon rare
From the far distance of a time long dead
Came on the wings of a fair-fortuned air,
With sound of martial music heralded,
In blazonry of storied shields arrayed.

So the *Great Harry* with high trumpetings,
The wind of victory in her burly sails!
And all her deck with clang of armour rings:
And under-flown the Lily standard trails,
And over-flown the royal Lions ramp.

The waves she rode are strewn with silent wrecks,
Her proud sea-comrades once; but ever yet

Comes time-defying laughter from her decks,
Where stands the lion-lord Plantagenet,
Large-hearted, merry, king of court and camp.

Sail on! sail on! The fatal blasts of time,
That spared so few, shall thee with joy escort;
And with the stormy thunder of thy rhyme
Shalt thou salute full many a centuried port
With "Ho! for Harry and red Agincourt!"

1898.

GUIDARELLO GUIDARELLI

RAVENNA WARRIOR (1502)

What was said to the Duke by the sculptor concerning Guidarello Guidarelli, and of the monument he made of his friend.¹

I

"GUIDARELLO GUIDARELLI!"
Ran a murmur low or loud,
As he rode with lifted vizor,
Smiling on the anxious crowd.

"Guidarello Guidarelli!"
Rang the cry from street and tower,
As our Guido rode to battle
In Ravenna's darkest hour.

"Guidarello Guidarelli!"
Little thought we of his doom
When a love-cast rain of roses
Fell on saddle, mail, and plume.

¹ This monumental recumbent statue is now in the museum at Ravenna.

Low he bowed, and laughing gaily
Set one red rose in his crest,
All his mail a scarlet splendour
From the red sun of the west.

"Guidarello Guidarelli!"
So he passed to meet his fate,
With the cry of "Guidarelli!"
And the clangour of the gate.

II

Well, at eve we bore him homeward,
Lying on our burdened spears.
Ah! defeat had been less bitter,
And had cost us fewer tears.

At her feet we laid her soldier,
While men saw her with amaze—
Fearless, tearless, waiting patient,
Some wild challenge in her gaze.

Then the hand that rained the roses
Fell upon his forehead cold.
"Go!" she cried, "ye faltering cravens!
One that fled, your shame has told.

"Go! How dare ye look upon him—
Ye who failed him in the fight?
Off! ye beaten hounds, and leave me
With my lonely dead to-night!"

GUIDARELLO GUIDARELLI

No man answered, and they left us
Where our darling Guido lay.
I alone, who stood beside him
In the fight, made bold to stay.

"Shut the gate !" she cried. I closed it.
"Lay your hand upon his breast ;
Were you true to him? " "Ay, surely,
As I hope for Jesu's rest!"

Then I saw her staring past me,
As to watch a bird that flies,
All the light of youthful courage
Fading from her valiant eyes.

And with one hoarse cry of anguish
On the courtyard stones she fell,
Crying, " Guido Guidarelli!"
Like the harsh notes of a bell

Breaking with its stress of sweetness,
Hence to know a voiceless pain.
"Guidarello Guidarelli!"
Never did she speak again:

Save, 't is said, she wins, when dreaming,
Tender memories of delight ;
"Guidarello Guidarelli!"
Crying through the quiet night.

III

Ah! you like it? Well, I made it
Ere death aged upon his face.
See, I caught the parted lip-lines
And the lashes' living grace:

For the gentle soul within him,
Freed by death, had lingered here,
Kissing his dead face to beauty,
As to bless a home grown dear.

He, my lord, was pure as woman,
Past the thought of man's belief;
Truth and honour here are written,
And some strangeness of relief

Born beneath my eager chisel
As a child is born—a birth
To my parent-skill mysterious,
Of, and yet not all of, earth.

Still one hears our women singing,—
For a love-charm, so 't is said,—
“Guidarello Guidarelli!”
Like a love-mass for the dead.

In caressing iteration
With his name their voices play—
“Elli, Nelli, Guidarelli,”
Through some busy market-day.

Ah, my lord, I have the fancy
That through many a year to come
This I wrought shall make the stranger
Share our grief when mine is dumb.

VENICE, *June*, 1897.

THE EVE OF BATTLE

1651

GIVE me thy thoughts, my gentle maid,
And I will lend them wings
To soar elate above this world
Of transitory things.

Give me thy virgin dreams, and I
Will give their shyness song,
Shall rise as with an angel's flight
That doth for heaven long.

And I will praise thee, dear, so well
That thou wilt wish to be
The lover of thy perfect self,
And coyly envy me.

Or I will close my eyes, and lie
Upon thy breast, to hear
How daring is that modest heart
When eyes are none to fear ;

THE EVE OF BATTLE

And I will wait till brooding love
Hath some new sweet matured,
As bides at eve the patient flower
Of dewy hopes assured ;

But if a clouded moment's dread
Forbid love's dew to fall,
I 'll know to hear what words I will
In love's confessional.

Or I will learn to share thy mood,
And silent think a space
How dear a little loss will make
Thy undiminished grace.

And from the harbour of thy breast
Shall sail joy-freighted ships
To seek, on daring ventures bent,
The fair port of thy lips.

Alas! alas! the trumpet calls ;
God help thy tender fears!
Ah, love would not be half of love
Had it not also tears!

Last night you kissed my shining blade,
And by the King I swore
That kiss should go where never kiss
Hath ever gone before.

You tied upon my helmet front
A lock of flowing gold ;
By heaven! he 'll have luck that rides
Before that pennon bold.

Ah! wilt thou ride in thought with me
Amid the Roundhead press,
I warrant thee full courteous room
Around my lady's tress.

I kneel, dear heart ; for one last kiss
Shall be a prayer to bring
God's blessing on the arms that strike
For God and for the King.

Good night! Again the trumpet calls ;
Now be thy heart as light
As that with which we gallants ride.
God bless thee, dear. Good night!

A WAR SONG OF TYROL

FREELY ENGLISHED FROM JOHANN SENN

(1792-1858)

"WILD eagle of the Tyrol,
Why are thy feathers red?"
"I 've been to greet the morning
On Ortler's crimsoned head!"

"Gray eagle of the Tyrol,
'T is not the morning light
Drips from the soaring pinions
That wing thy airy flight.

"Proud eagle of the Tyrol,
Why are thy claws so red?"
"I 've been where Etschland's maidens
The ruddy vintage tread."

"Gray eagle of the Tyrol,
Red runs our Tyrol wine;
But redder ran the vintage
That stained those claws of thine.

“Wild eagle of the Tyrol,
Why is thy beak so red?”
“Go ask the gorge of Stilfes,¹
Where lie the Saxon dead!

“The grapes were ripe in August
Wherewith my beak is red;
The vines that gave that vintage
No other wine will shed:
My beak is red with battle;
I 've been among the dead!”

1897.

¹ Here the Tyrolese defeated Marshal Lefebvre and the Saxon auxiliaries of France.

THE "TEXAS"

SEEN FROM THE BEACH AT ATLANTIC CITY,
MAY 6, 1898

FAIR in the white array of peace,
We saw her from the distant shore,
And felt the quickened pulse increase
To know what gallant flag she bore.
Proud namesake of the Lonely Star,
God speed thee on thy watery way,
Or be it peace, or be it war,
That waits thee in that Southern bay.
To yon far island of the sea,
Twin sister of the Lonely Star,
Good luck and honour go with thee,
Or be it peace, or be it war!

1898.

THE SEA-GULL

I

THE woods are full of merry minstrelsy ;
Glad are the hedges with the notes of spring ;
But o'er the sad and uncompanioned sea
No love-born voices ring.

II

Gray mariner of every ocean clime,
If I could wander on as sure a wing,
Or beat with yellow web thy pathless sea,
I too might cease to sing.

III

Would I could share thy silver-flashing swoop,
Thy steady poise above the bounding deep,
Or buoyant float with thine instinctive trust,
Rocked in a dreamless sleep.

IV

Thine is the heritage of simple things,
The untasked liberty of sea and air,
Some tender yearning for the peopled nest,
Thy only freight of care.

V

Thou hast no forecast of the morrow's need,
No bitter memory of yesterdays;
Nor stirs thy thought that airy sea o'erhead,
Nor ocean's soundless ways.

VI

Thou silent raider of the abounding sea,
Intent and resolute, ah, who may guess
What primal notes of gladness thou hast lost
In this vast loneliness!

VII

Where bides thy mate? On some lorn ocean rock
Seaward she watches. Hark! the one shrill cry,
Strident and harsh, across the wave shall be
Her welcome—thy reply.

VIII

When first thy sires, with joy-discovered flight,
High on exultant pinions sped afar,
Had they no cry of gladness or of love,
No bugle note of war?

IX

What gallant song their happy treasury held,
Such as the pleasant woodland folk employ,
The lone sea thunder quelled. Thou hast one note
For love, for hate, for joy.

X

Yet who that hears this stormy ocean voice
Would not, like them, at last be hushed and stilled,
Were all his days through endless ages past
With this stern music filled?

XI

What matters it? Ah! not alone are loved
Leaf-cloistered poets who can love in song.
Home to the wild-eyed! Home! She will not miss
The music lost so long.

XII

Home! for the night wind signals, "Get thee home";
Home, hardy admiral of the rolling deep;
Home from the foray! Home! That silenced song
Love's endless echoes keep.

1898.

EGYPT

I SAW two vultures, gray they were and gorged :
One on a mosque sat high, asleep he seemed,
Claw-stayed within the silver crescent's curve ;
Not far away, another, gray as he,
As full content and somnolent with food,
Clutched with instinctive grip the golden cross
High on the church an alien creed had built.
Yon in the museum mighty Rameses sleeps,
For some new childhood swaddled like a babe.
Osiris and Jehovah, Allah, Christ,
This land hath known, and, in the dawn of time,
The brute-god-creature crouching in the sand,
Ere Rameses worshipped and ere Seti died.
How much of truth to each new faith He gave
Who is the very father of all creeds,
I know not now—nor shall know. Ever still
Past temple, palace, tomb, the great Nile flows,
Free and more free of bounty as men learn
To use his values. Only this I know.

CAIRO, 1899.

GIBRALTAR AT DAWN

UP and over the sea we came,
And saw the dayspring leap in flame.
Full in face Gibraltar lay,
Crouching, lion-like, at bay,
Stern and still and battle-scarred,
Grimly keeping watch and ward.
Hark, and hear the morning gun
Salute time's admiral, the sun,
While the bleak old storied keep,
That hath never known to sleep,
Golden 'neath the morning lies,
Sentinelled with memories,
Heard when, rolling from afar,
The hoarse waves thunder, "Trafalgar!"

AT SEA, *December*, 1898.

EVENING

I KNOW the night is near at hand.
The mists lie low on hill and bay,
The autumn sheaves are dewless, dry;
But I have had the day.

Yes, I have had, dear Lord, the day;
When at Thy call I have the night,
Brief be the twilight as I pass
From light to dark, from dark to light.

October, 1899.



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